

CH-661

1910

Rock Point Foursquares

Bel Alton, MD

Private/Public

This Rock Point Foursquares is a small historic district which includes two 1910 two-story foursquares facing the Wicomico River and an adjoining portion of the early twentieth century concrete roadbed known as the Southern Maryland Truckline. Rock Point, near the confluence of the Wicomico and Potomac Rivers, developed as a prominent steamboat landing in the 19th century known as Lancaster's wharf and continued to evolve as the home of Charles County's largest oyster industry in the late 19th and early 20th century. In the early 20th century it was the home of several oyster packing houses as well as a schoolhouse, Catholic chapel and storehouse. Rock Point shared its maritime orientation with Bushwood in St. Mary's County which lies directly across the Wicomico River. Both dwellings in the district appear to be well-preserved including decorative finishes such as original wood shingle siding and late-Victorian scrollsawn brackets adorning the porch. The dwellings include locally characteristic foursquare elements including a hipped roof with hipped-roof dormers and a full-width hipped roof porch. The remaining original roadbed is approximately one mile in length from MD 257 to the terminus of Rock Point, with extensive erosion evident at the shoreline. The road is concrete with large pebbles, and seams that divide the roadbed in regular intervals.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. CH-661

1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Rock Point Road Foursquares

other

2. Location

street and number 17446 & 17454 Rock Point Road not for publication

city, town Rock Point vicinity

county Charles

3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Multiple Property Owners

street and number telephone

city, town state zip code

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Charles County Courthouse tax map and parcel: 89 p. 109

city, town La Plata liber folio

5. Primary Location of Additional Data

- ☐ Contributing Resource in National Register District
- ☐ Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
- ☐ Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- ☐ Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- ☐ Recorded by HABS/HAER
- ☐ Historic Structure Report or Research Report
- ☐ Other

6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function	Resource Count
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	Contributing Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> defense	1
<input type="checkbox"/> site		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> domestic	3
<input type="checkbox"/> object		<input type="checkbox"/> education	
		<input type="checkbox"/> funerary	
		<input type="checkbox"/> government	
		<input type="checkbox"/> health care	
		<input type="checkbox"/> industry	
		<input type="checkbox"/> landscape	
		<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture	
		<input type="checkbox"/> religion	
		<input type="checkbox"/> social	
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation	
		<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	
		<input type="checkbox"/> unknown	
		<input type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use	
		<input type="checkbox"/> other:	
			Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory
			0

7. Description

Inventory No. CH-661

Condition

<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> altered

Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

This district, including 17446 and 17454 Rock Point Road, consists of two 1910 two-story foursquares facing the Wicomico River and an adjoining portion of the early twentieth century concrete roadbed known as the Southern Maryland Truckline. Although requiring further survey, both dwellings appear to be well-preserved including decorative finishes such as original wood shingle siding and late-Victorian scrollsawn brackets adorning the porch. The dwellings include locally characteristic foursquare elements including a hipped roof with hipped-roof dormers and a full-width hipped roof porch. Both lots have a dual orientation facing the Wicomico River to the northeast and the adjoining concrete Southern Maryland Truckline to the southwest. The roadbed is approximately one mile in length from MD 257 to the terminus of Rock Point, with extensive erosion evident at the shoreline. The road is concrete with large pebbles, and seams that divide the roadbed in regular intervals.

8. Significance

Inventory No. CH-661

Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science	
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history	
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/	<input type="checkbox"/> maritime industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation	
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:	

Specific dates	1910	Architect/Builder	unknown
Construction dates	1910		

Evaluation for:

☐ National Register ☐ Maryland Register ☒ not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance reports, complete evaluation on a DOE Form - see manual.)

The Rock Point Road district represents a period of the area's early development. Rock Point, near the confluence of the Wicomico and Potomac Rivers, developed as a prominent steamboat landing in the 19th century known as Lancaster's wharf and continued to evolve as the home of Charles County's largest oyster industry in the late 19th and early 20th century. Rock Point originally covered a large area roughly from Charleston Creek to the north, to the north shore of Neales Creek. In the early 20th century it was the home of several oyster packing houses as well as a schoolhouse, Catholic chapel and storehouse. Rock Point shared its maritime orientation with Bushwood in St. Mary's County which lies directly across the Wicomico River.

Although requiring further research, the two foursquares at Rock Point are believed to have been owned by members of the Lancaster family, who were prominent landholders in the Rock Point vicinity since the 18th century. During the late 19th and early 20th century the Lancaster family were active in the oyster industry at Rock Point.

Commercial seafood was an important industry that began to appear in Southern Maryland during the 1870s and 1880s. Oysters, along with shad and herring, were important exports in Southern Maryland during the late 19th century. At least three large oyster bottoms were located off of Charles County's shoreline. These included Cobb Island Bar, Swan Point Bar, Kettle Bottom Shoals and Old Farm Bar, the largest in the area between Popes Creek and the Kettle Bottom Channel. Urban growth throughout the nation stimulated the growth of the packing industry in Baltimore. Improved rail transportation, combined with improvements in food preservation, meant for the first time canned goods could now follow rail lines across the country and into the frontier.

After the Civil War, the oyster grounds and fisheries in New England were largely depleted and many waterman from the North turned their efforts to the Chesapeake Bay. Between 1872-1892, Maryland on average produced over 10 million bushels per year. The harvest of 1884-85 brought in 15 million bushels, the highest yield before and since, and represented 1/3 of the worldwide oyster harvest during that year. The agricultural depression of the post-war years encouraged many to abandon or supplement farming with seafood. By 1880, 120 people claimed to be either a fisherman, sailor or oysterman. Roughly half were oystermen.

The enormous fortunes at stake in the oyster industry, combined with over harvesting and declining yields, led to the infamous Oyster Wars of the late 19th century. Competition between oystermen was fierce and at times led to violence. Oystermen from the Northern Neck of Virginia, and the Maryland and Virginia Eastern Shore began dredging local oyster grounds, stiffening yields of local watermen. Labor was also a problem and many accounts exist of immigrants in rural areas being "shanghaied" during the times of peak harvests. Some were brutally treated. Other accounts tell of workers not being compensated, or who were abandoned or thrown overboard. Maryland's conservation commissioner, Swepson Earle stated in the early twentieth century that "the toughest of tough places on the Chesapeake in the 1890's was Rock Point on the Potomac River at the mouth of the Wicomico. Three killings a week created no civic resentment, while many weeks during the oyster season marked the departure from this life of as many as five or six men." Although it is difficult to judge just how overstated this may have been, in 1905 several highly

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties For

Inventory No CH-661

Name Rock Point Road Foursquares

Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 1

publicized shoot-outs are known to have occurred off of the Cobb Neck Bar.

As a result of the railroad, Maryland became the leading state for packing oysters as well as a variety of farm produce including tomatoes. In Baltimore, canning was second only to garment-making. In 1880 Baltimore contributed 1/3 of all canning done in the United States. Along the Patuxent River, Benedict rivaled Solomon's Island in the number of oyster packing houses. Between 1900 and 1920 there were four companies in operation. Rock Point is known to have had at least four packing houses.

During World War II, local watermen discovered a large oyster strike on Swann Point Bar to the north. After the poor harvests and low prices of the early 20th century, these large, white flavorful oysters prompted a resurgence in the oyster industry along with increased hostility between competing Virginia and Maryland oystermen and officials.

The Southern Maryland Truckline was one of the first large-scale State road building projects. By the early 1900s many of the area's steamboat lines had begun to flounder. Competition from the railroad, and more importantly, automobiles caused the steamboat business to deteriorate. The last steamboat docked in Charles County in 1932. The greater ease of movement and economical aspects of the automobile attracted many former steamboat users. In addition, newer better roads were being built throughout Charles County, making overland transportation faster and easier. In 1909, Maryland produced a plan to establish highway systems connecting all the counties. In southern Maryland the planned highway connected Mattawoman Village to Brandywine in Prince George's County, and ran from Mattawoman to Waldorf, Young's Switch (White Plains), La Plata, Spring Hill, Bel Alton, Faulkner, Newburg, and on to Lancaster's Wharf at Rock Point. A second highway was planned to connect Waldorf, Beantown, Bryantown, and Hughesville to points south in St. Mary's County. A third road connected La Plata to Port Tobacco, Welcome, Hilltop, Ironsides, Doncaster, and Riverside. While the entire system was never realized, the first proposal became the framework for present-day Route 301 (Crain Highway), and the second traces the current line of Route 5, Leonardtown Road. The third was realized in Route 6 or Port Tobacco Road. In order to service the steamboat wharves along the Potomac with automobiles, the state also planned a coastal route connecting each of the Potomac River wharves from Marshall Hall to Riverside. Portions of this were built, and have become Riverside Road in the western section of the county. Most of the county's roads were initially paved with oyster shells from the Indian deposits at Pope's Creek or with gravel from the numerous deposits across the county. By 1930, there were 167 miles of gravel road in Charles County, and only five miles of concrete highway.

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH-661

Section 9 Page 1

Rock Point Foursquares
name of property
Charles County, MD
county and state

Major Bibliographic References:

Brown, Jack D., et al. *Charles County, Maryland, A History*.
Charles County Bicentennial Committee, 1976.

Charles County Land Records, Charles County Courthouse, LaPlata, Maryland.

Hardy, Cathy Currey. "Phase III Final Report Charles County Historic Sites Survey."
Charles County Planning. July 2002.

KCI Technologies, Inc. *Draft--Historic Context For the U.S. 301 Southern Corridor
Transportation Study*. August 1996.

Klapthor, Margaret Brown. *The History of Charles County, Maryland*.
LaPlata, MD: Charles County Tercentenary, Inc., 1958.

Lewis, J. Frank & Company. *The Maryland Directory*. 1880. Baltimore

Tilp, Frederick. *This Was Potomac River*. Frederick Tilp, 1978.

Maps

Griffith, Dennis. *Map of the State of Maryland Laid down from an actual Survey of all the
principal Waters, public Roads, and Divisions of the Counties therein....*Philadelphia, PA: J.
Tallance, Engraver, June 6, 1795.

Martenet, Simon J. *Martenet's Map of Maryland and the District of Columbia*. Baltimore, MD:
Simon J. Martenet, C.E., 1865; revised 1885.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Inventory No. CH-661

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property unknown

Acreage of historical setting unknown

Quadrangle name Rock Point

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification

The property is associated with Charles County Property Tax Map 89, parcel 109.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cathy Hardy/Historic Sites Survey

organization Charles County Planning

date 1/5/2003

street and number 200 Baltimore Street

telephone 301-396-5815

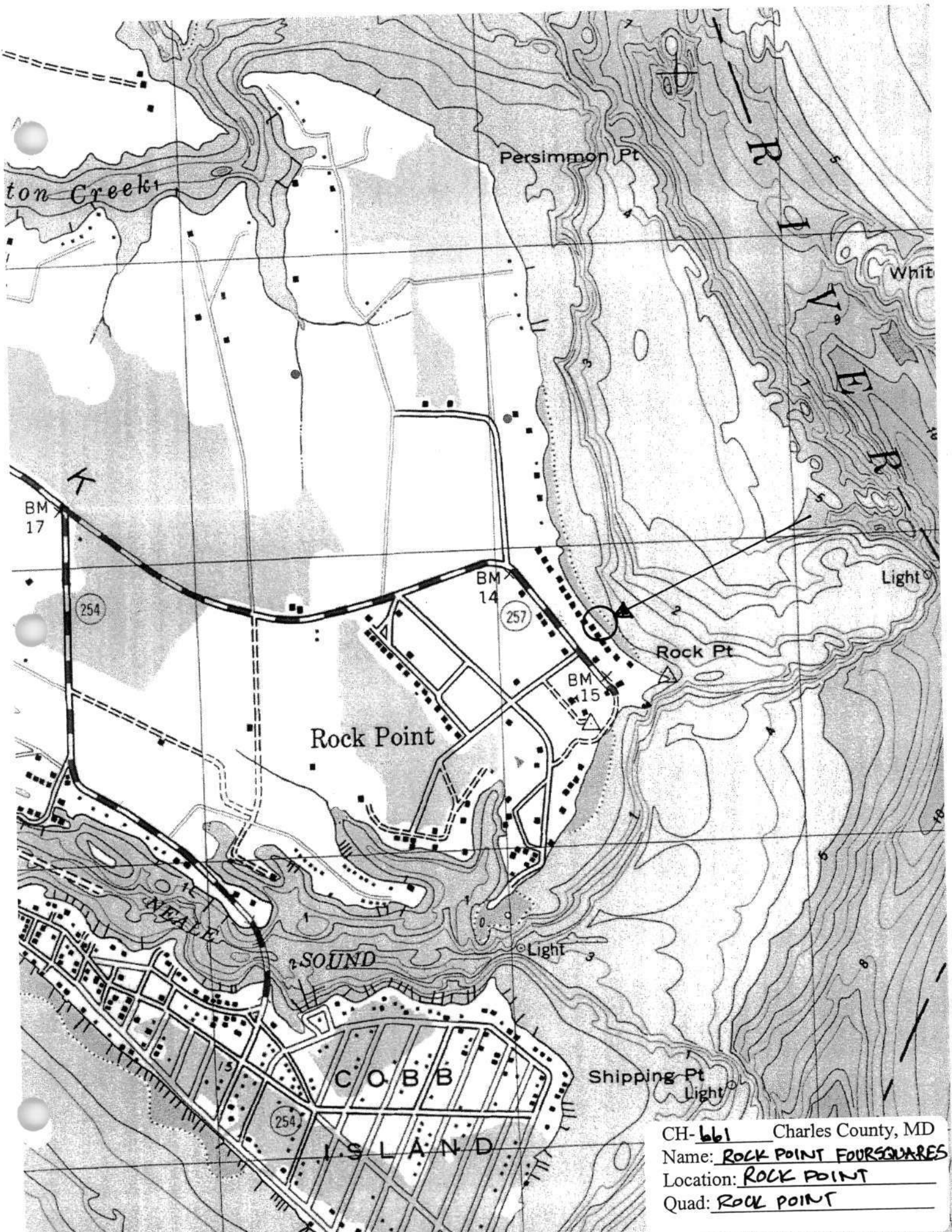
city or town La Plata

state MD zip code 20646

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
DHCD/DHCP
100 Community Place
Crownsville MD 21032
410-514-7600



CH-661 Charles County, MD
Name: ROCK POINT FOURSQUARES
Location: ROCK POINT
Quad: ROCK POINT



CH-661

ROCK POINT ROAD FOURSQUARES

ROCK POINT, MD

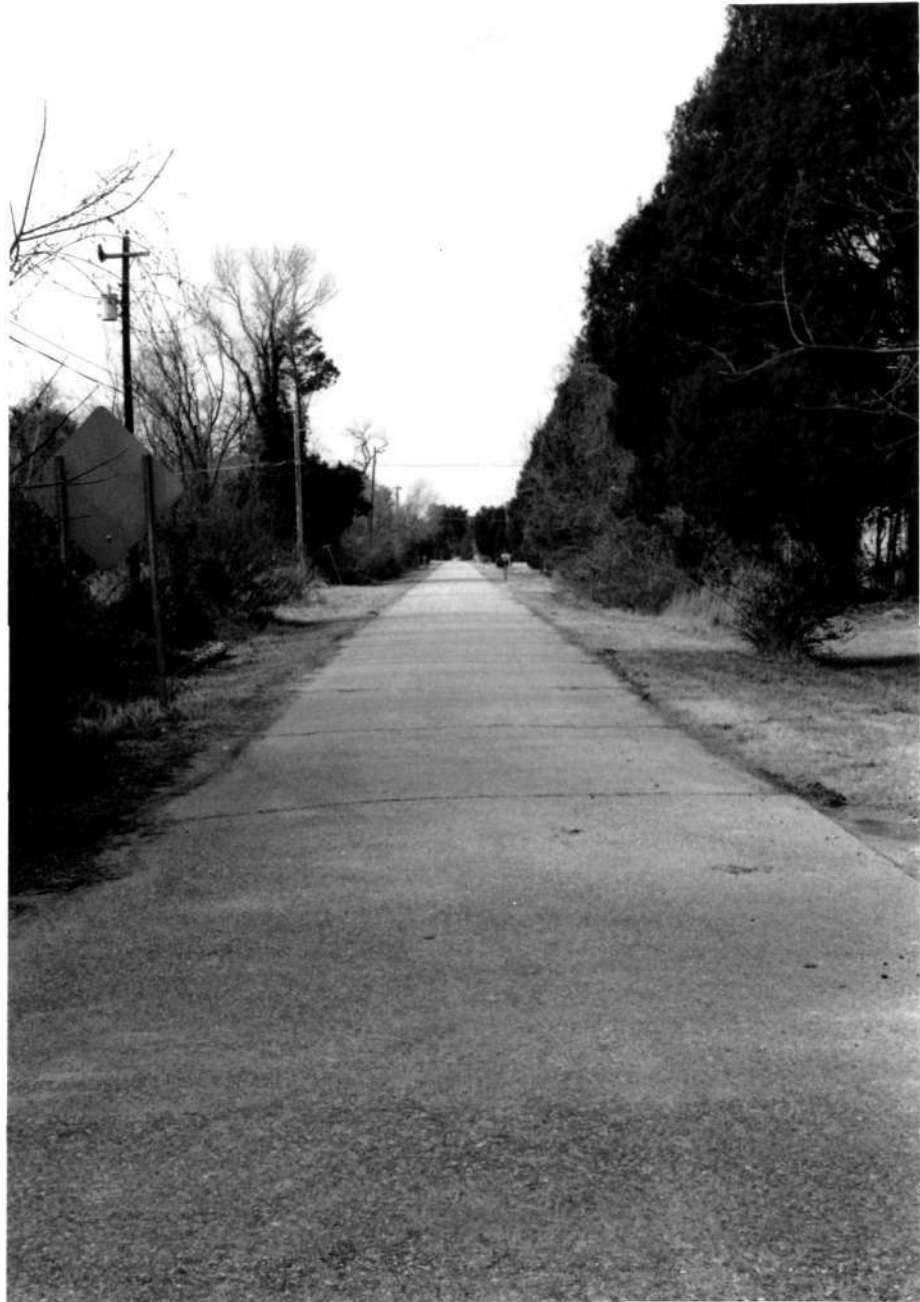
3/2001

C. HARDY

MD SHPS

17446¹⁷⁴⁵⁴ ROCK POINT RD, LOOKING E

lot 2



CH 661

ROCK POINT ROAD FOURSQUARES

ROCK POINT, MD

3/2001

C. HARDY

MD SHPO

ROADBED, LOOKING SW

2 OF 2